Center for Human Environments

Annual Report:  July 1, 2010 - June 30, 2011

Professor Roger Hart, Director

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A. ACTIVITIES

The Center for Human Environments (CHE) continued its very active involvement in externally funded research projects in 2010-2011, with approximately 20 grants underway during the year, and another 8 pending at the time of writing. It is also noteworthy that CHE researchers continue to submit a substantial number of proposals to federal agencies, including the NIH, NSF, EPA, Dept. of Education and Dept. of Defense. In the past 18 months, an NIH grant, an NIH/National Cancer Institute subcontract, and a Dept. of Defense subcontract have been awarded to researchers at our Center.

Marking the close of the 2010-2011 academic year were several new and notable initiatives at CHE:

• Two major international projects were launched at the Children’s Environments Research Group: the “Article 15 Project,” and the UNICEF-sponsored “Education in Emergencies” project. The “Article 15 Project,” funded by a consortium of international agencies, will look at children’s self-organizing in a global context; the “Education in Emergencies” project will develop a toolkit for evaluating educational facilities used by children in emergency situations (displacement by natural disaster, conflict, etc.) In addition to CERG Co-directors Roger Hart and Pamela Wridt and CERG staff member Blair Osler, two GC doctoral students are expected to play an important role in these initiatives.

• Two Critical Participatory Action Research Summer Institutes, developed by Michelle Fine, Maria Torre and the Public Science Project, attracted 90 registrants from across the US and Canada. These week-long workshops brought together university scholars, staff of community organizations and advocacy groups, and secondary school educators to learn how to develop effective participatory research projects in their communities. GC doctoral students were invited participants at several of the workshop sessions.

• New federal funding for health research was received from the National Cancer Institute and the Department of Defense by Tracey Revenson. These new subcontracts, both through Mt Sinai Medical School, continue Prof. Revenson’s longstanding research focus on quality of life concerns for cancer patients, and will also afford GC doctoral students training opportunities in health psychology.

CHE researchers also continued their work on major projects begun or already underway in the last 12 months:

• In the first full year of its three-year term, Mary Clare Lennon’s NIH/NICHD grant “Residential Mobility and Young Children” employed three graduate students on an analysis of data from a long-term Princeton University survey of the health and well-being of young children in the US.
• Continuing work on a two-year Ford Foundation grant awarded in 2009, Michelle Fine organized three day-long meetings, at the Ford Foundation and at the Graduate Center, each bringing together dozens of experts and advocates on secondary education and social justice in the US. The final report for this project, which is expected in Fall 2011, is intended to provide a guide for Ford and other philanthropies on how best to support both social justice and improved quality in US secondary education. Prof. Fine also serves as PI for a collection of grants for the “Student Success Centers,” a project involving peer-led college counseling in NYC public high schools. This project, which first came to CHE in 2009, attracted additional funding in the past year from New York State, from a private foundation (Deutsche Bank), from the Brooklyn Community Trust, and continuing support from its major donor, the New York Community Trust.

• For the Children’s Environments Research Group (CERG), co-directed by Roger Hart and Pamela Wridt, the 2010-2011 academic year marked a culmination of work on the Child Friendly Cities project, which has been supported by three years of institutional contracts from UNICEF’s Innocenti Research Centre (Italy), and by additional support in the past year from the Bernard van Leer Foundation (The Netherlands). The CERG research team has now seen the Child Friendly Cities assessment tools developed by them put into use in a dozen different countries (including in the local NYC setting of an East Harlem community center).

• During the past year, CHE affiliate organization ActKnowledge has taken on several new projects in international development, social justice, public health and community schooling. ActKnowledge has grown to be a leader in the community school field, and is now working on the research and evaluation portion of several federal grants awarded to New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware schools, as well as serving as an advisor to Quebec community schools. In 2011 ActKnowledge will also commence two new multi-year grants, collaborating with Graduate Center Professors Michelle Fine and William Kornblum, as well as with the Public Science Project (a research team based at CHE) and the Center for Urban Research (another GC research center). In its collaboration with Prof. Kornblum, ActKnowledge expands its work on public space with an applied ethnographic study of visitor usage of the Staten Island section of the Gateway National Recreation Area (funder: the National Park Service). And after seven years of development, ActKnowledge recently launched a free, online application for use by social change organizations that seek to engage in rigorous participatory research and planning. Foundations, community organizations and NGO’s worldwide can now use Actknowledge’s “Theory of Change Online” to develop and share their work at www.theoryofchange.org. As in the past, throughout many of its projects and activities, ActKnowledge continues to hire students from the Graduate Center, who make valuable contributions to their respective areas, including Research and Evaluation, Social Media, and Data, Policy, and Social Justice work.
Notable events from the CHE calendar for 2010-2011. These conferences, meetings and presentations were sponsored or co-sponsored by the Center for Human Environments, and were partially or wholly supported by funds administered by CHE.


- **Cross-National Think Tank on Loss and Grief.** Feb. 11, 2011 at the Graduate Center. A day-long seminar on grief and resilience, grief and community organizing and other topics. Co-sponsors: the Public Science Project at CHE; the Clinical Psychology Program at CUNY Graduate Center; MA in Mental Health Counseling at College of Staten Island, CUNY; and York University Psychology Clinic, Toronto, Canada. Partially supported by McMaster Univ./Canadian Institute of Health funding (administered by CHE).

- **Researching Children, Global Childhoods & Education.** March 24-25 at the Graduate Center. Conference organizer: Prof. Wendy Luttrell, Urban Education. An international conference bringing together experts in Critical Childhood and Educational Studies, with the aim of advancing theories and methodological practices that cultivate children's agency in the research and educational process. Presenters included Roger Hart and Pamela Wridt, CERG Co-directors. This conference was partly supported by a grant from Abbey Capital Ltd., Ireland (administered by CHE).

- **Public Scholarship & the Academy.** April 7, 2011 at the Graduate Center. Conference organizers: Michelle Fine and Maria Torre. Roundtable discussion on the obligations of a public university. Participants included community leaders, CUNY faculty, staff and students. Supported by a grant from the “Bringing Theory to Practice” project of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (administered by CHE).

- **Extended Learning Time as a Resource for Educational Justice in Schools and Communities.** May 6, 2011 at the Graduate Center. Reflections on programs to extend learning time and their impact on inequality in US secondary education. Supported by the Ford Foundation and the Surdna Foundation (funds administered by CHE).

- Last, Mary Clare Lennon is pleased to report that two of the Sociology graduate students working on her NIH/NICHD grant have had papers stemming from the project accepted at the American Sociological Association’s 2011 annual meeting. An important aspect of Prof. Lennon’s R15 NIH grant is graduate student training, and these acceptances illustrate how this CHE-administered grant is contributing in a significant way to doctoral student education at the GC.
B. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

CHE researchers’ plans for 2011-2012 include:

- Submit proposal to NSF for a two-year project on “Relational complexity for immigrant and US-born children” (Colette Daiute). *Note: this proposal was submitted via NSF Fastlane on 7/13/2011.*

- Develop R01 NIH proposal based on expansion of current federally funded health research (Tracey Revenson).

- Develop cross-national (UK and US) research proposal dealing with health and well-being of young children (Mary Clare Lennon).

- Continue the multi-year evaluation project of the Brooklyn community based organization El Puente, funded by the Kellogg Fdn. (Michelle Fine and Maria Torre/Public Science Project).

- Seek additional funding from foundations and community trusts for the Student Success Centers, which have now been adopted as the new model for college counseling in dozens of NYC public schools. Student Success Centers research staff at CHE will also continue working with other CUNY-run college preparedness programs, with which they have collaborated in the past. (Michelle Fine serves as PI for Student Success Center grants.)

- Continue work on the Polling for Community Justice project on NYC youth and policing practices. Funded by the Public Welfare Foundation, with an additional contribution from Pace University/Open Society Institute. (Brett Stoudt and Michelle Fine, Co-PIs).

- ActKnowledge will collaborate with GC PIs on new proposals to the Department of Interior/National Park Service (PI, William Kornblum) and the Helmsley Trust (for work focused on NYC public schools; PI, Michelle Fine). *Note: these two proposals were both funded as of August 2011.* In addition, ActKnowledge intends to increase its work with international development, community schools and other education innovations throughout the United States. ActKnowledge will also publish a book that discusses how to plan for social change initiatives, and will be disseminating its message about social change work and research through use of social media.

- CERG will continue the work of its main international projects. For the Child Friendly Communities project, it expects to receive continued funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The participatory Assessment of Learning Environments will receive funding from UNICEF through March of 2012 and may be expanded to include child
friendly schools that are not in emergency contexts. Further funding is being requested for the “Article 15 Project” from private foundations to add to the support from Save the Children Norway, WorldVision and UNICEF. Continued support is also expected from these three organizations. CERG is also pursuing corporate funding with the US Fund for UNICEF for its US Child Friendly Communities project; it expects to collaborate with the US Fund for UNICEF and with a group of New York foundations for the New York area initiative of this project. In summary, CERG funding is expected to increase from its present levels during 2012.